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U.S. Company Helps Smallholder Farmers Fight Hunger Abroad



Jen Cupp, USAID

The United States has always been a world leader in the fight to end hunger and poverty. This spring, our partners share how [recent efforts embody the best of the United States](#) and why this leadership matters. The following is a guest post authored by Eduardo Mendías, senior market and product development manager for Toro Micro-Irrigation Business, part of The Toro Company based in California.

Toro's first foray into the smallholder market has been a very fulfilling experience to date. As a 100-year-old company, Toro has developed a strong sense of social responsibility with the communities and industries in which we do business. We've felt a strong need to make sure that our drip irrigation technologies are available to smallholder farmers just like we have made them available to large-scale farmers throughout the world.

We also realized that to be successful in entering this new market, we needed partners experienced in reaching smallholder farmers. So we joined with iDE, a nonprofit specializing in providing water solutions to smallholder farmers in developing countries, and received investment funding from the [Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation](#) program. Toro designed drip irrigation kits for the Zambian smallholder market and iDE helped us enter the market by providing farmer education and training.

What began as a pilot initiative for Toro continues to grow because of its potential to help struggling farmers around the world.

This is good for farmers and good for business.

We believe that leading agricultural corporations have a responsibility to make their products relevant to both large and

small farmers and to help address global issues such as nutrition, hunger and poverty. This is good for farmers and good for business. It's in a company's best interest to enter new markets and to help improve agriculture, as this will facilitate industry growth both domestically and abroad.

Innovation Meets Farmers' Needs

Unpredictable and inefficient delivery of scarce water resources to crops is one of the most significant impediments smallholders face in maximizing their on-farm returns. Drip irrigation, unlike traditional surface flooding and unpredictable rainfall, delivers water to the root systems of crops.

With this technology, smallholder farmers can secure an income stream throughout the year because they can farm in the dry season, independent of the amount of rain. It also allows them to be more efficient with labor and fertilizer, giving them the opportunity to grow higher quality and higher yield crops. Ultimately, it gives them better control over their crops.

As smallholders become more proficient at using drip irrigation, they have the option to grow higher value crops like fruits and vegetables, which not only help them meet their own families' nutritional needs, but also improve their incomes and move out of poverty. In Honduras, this has helped coffee farmers diversify their production, enabling them to hedge against falling coffee prices and crop losses due to the coffee rust disease.

Partnerships Achieve Progress

The challenge has been to create the supply channels to reach smallholder farmers. With funding from Feed the Future, we've been able to develop partnerships that help develop these supply chains and deliver technology and knowledge to rural areas in developing countries through a model that is reproducible, scalable and sustainable. The training and education iDE's farm business advisors provide also helps create market linkages for farmers to sell their surplus crops.

This work benefits both the United States and other countries by generating new channels of economic activity, trade and commerce between the demand of markets at the top of the pyramid and the new agricultural producers at the bottom.

For Toro and for the smallholders we have helped thus far, this project translates to a real opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and build a better future. Local food production like this is a sustainable way for the world to end hunger and poverty.

More from This Series:

- [Here's What Happens When Global Hunger Meets American Ingenuity](#)
- [Hope for Ending Hunger](#)
- [Ten Things I Like About Feed the Future](#)
- [How a Global Trip Inspired This Californian to Focus Locally](#)